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Special Committee on decolonization GA/COL/2927
13 July 1994 - 1435th Meeting (AM)

PETITIONERS TELL SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ABUSES IN EAST TIMOR BY INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT

Human rights abuses by Indonesian military and police units, the suppression of free expression and limited access by international human rights organizations were evidence of continuing repression in East Timor, the Special Committee on decolonization was told this morning as it began consideration of the question of East Timor.

The United Nations shared responsibility for the human rights problem there, a representative of Amnesty International told the Special Committee. A March statement by the Commission on Human Rights had encouraged the preservation of the status quo in East Timor by making no mention of torture and ill-treatment of political detainees.

A petitioner from the British Coalition for East Timor, said that the provision of $5.2 billion in assistance to Indonesia for next year demonstrated that Western nations would do nothing to pressure Jakarta to change its ways. A petitioner from the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor said that intensified repression was evidence that Timorese youth were willing to fight for freedom, refusing to be Indonesian.

Human rights activist "Xanana" Gusmao was serving a 20-year prison sentence, but his trial had not complied with international standards nor with Indonesian law, a petitioner from the Parliamentarians for East Timor said. A petitioner from the East Timor Alert Network of Canada, said many East Timorese women had been forcibly injected with contraceptives or sterilized in order to minimize the birth rate of the Territory.

A representative of Indonesia said that consideration of East Timor by the Special Committee was unwarranted because the Territory was a province of Indonesia with rights and obligations equal to those of other provinces.

Also speaking this morning were petitioners from the Timorese Democratic Union, East Timor Action Network of the United States, Free East Timore Japan Coalition, Pax Christi International, Agir pour Timor, Hobart East Timor Coalition, and the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor/Philippine Solidarity for East Timor and Indonesia.

The Special Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. this afternoon to continue its discussion of East Timor.

Committee Work Programme

The Special Committee on decolonization met this morning to hear petitions on East Timor and to consider reports from its Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance on East Timor and 10 small Territories: American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands. (For a detailed background on the Subcommittee reports see Press Release GA/COL/2923 of 11 July.)

The report of the Subcommittee on the question of East Timor (document A/AC.109/L.1815) summarizes consideration of the question by the General Assembly; political developments, along with the human rights situation; and the economic and social condition, as well as information on health and education. It cites the fourth round of talks, held in May this year in Geneva, in which the Secretary-General met with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Portugal and Indonesia. That discussion focused on confidence-building measures aimed at fostering an atmosphere propitious to addressing the substance of the question.

The report also contains information on a February 1994 report by Amnesty International which states that the Government of Indonesia had taken a number of initiatives in support of human rights since late 1991

but that they seemed to be principally aimed at improving Indonesia's international image rather than addressing the root causes of the problem.

Discussion on East Timor

FRANCISCO NICOLAU, of the Timorese Democratic Union, said that on the eastern part of Timor island, the Government of Indonesia permitted all forms of human rights violations. At last year's World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Indonesia had reached the heights of hypocrisy by calling "sacred" the right to maintain physical integrity, the right to free expression and the right to life. The Timorese Democratic Union was the traditional nationalist party of East Timor which had never collaborated with Indonesia. The force of Timorese nationalist parties had been insufficient to curtail the barbarity of the armed forces of Indonesia, but they hoped that one day President Soeharto would learn the lessons of history.

ALYN WARE, from the Hobart East Timor Committee, said there were many excuses which Indonesia had used to explain why it had invaded East Timor. The first was that it believed the Territory was "going communist". However, "that 680,000 people in East Timor would go communist would have little impact compared with the millions of communists who already existed in Indonesia". Other speculations were that Indonesia was worried that East Timor was going independent and that was why it had been invaded. An independent East Timor, eligible for a wide range of United Nations and bilateral aid packages, was seen by Jakarta as a threat because it could exacerbate existing discontent in the South Moluccas and nearby islands.

He said that East Timor had remained a "training ground", a way for the Indonesian military to augment their pay through a variety of corrupt practices. Soeharto and his generals had seen it as a means to restore some prestige to Indonesia's military. The Indonesian Army had taken over Timorese land, possessions and resources. The Timorese languages had been banned and their culture had being undermined. Furthermore, Timorese families and communities had been broken up and dispossessed. He said those were many powerful legal and moral reasons why the United Nations should be willing to be as active in East Timor as it had been in Cambodia, Bosnia and elsewhere. The "Dili massacre" in 1991, had reminded the world that that tragedy had come 16 years after the Security Council had specifically requested "Indonesia to withdraw, without further delay, all its forces from the territory".

ABDUL NASIER (Indonesia) said that East Timor was a province of Indonesia with rights and obligations equal to those of other provinces. The consideration of East Timor by the Special Committee was unwarranted.

CONSUELO VILLANUEVA, of Amnesty International, said that Indonesia had been directly responsible for systematic human rights violations in East Timor for 20 years. The Member States of the United Nations shared responsibility for the long-standing human rights problem there. Since the last meeting of the Special Committee, the international community appeared to have turned its back on systematic violations of human rights in East Timor. Some had accepted the Indonesian Government's promises of "openness", but in recent weeks three of Indonesia's leading news magazines had been banned and arbitrary detention and ill treatment had been used to suppress those who had spoken out against the Government.

Many Governments continued to supply military equipment to Indonesia, she said. That "business as usual" approach sent a clear signal that human rights took second place to economic interests. The lack of concerted international pressure had contributed to the perpetuation of torture and ill treatment. The consensus statement read by the the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights in March of this year had actually praised Indonesia for unspecified "positive measures". That statement seemed to have encouraged the preservation of the status quo. That statement had made no mention of the torture and ill-treatment of political detainees and had failed to mention the recommendations made by the Commission's Special Rapporteur on torture following his visit to East Timor and Indonesia in 1991. The failure of the Commission to specifically refer to torture helped ensure that nothing would change.

With respect to extrajudicial executions and disappearances, the Commission's statement obscured the inadequacy of Indonesia's response to the "Santa Cruz Massacre", she said. The Government had provided clarification on the fate of only a small fraction of the estimated 270 dead and 200 missing and had published false information. The Human Rights Commission had given a misleading impression that Indonesia had undertaken a "policy of expanding access" to East Timor. International human rights and

humanitarian organizations were kept under close surveillance, making their work difficult and potentially dangerous to Timorese that they contacted.

SHARON SCHARFE, from the East Timor Alert Network of Canada, said the Canadian Government had cancelled two aid projects totalling millions of dollars due to Canadian citizens' concerns after the 1991 Dili massacre and the events following it.

She said the human rights of East Timor's women had been violated numerous times. There had been many documented cases of women who had been forced to become local "wives" for the Indonesian military posted in East Timor. Children had been conceived through those imposed husbands. Women were also being injected with contraceptives without their knowledge. Women in East Timor had been forcibly sterilized as well. That was being done to keep the birth rate in East Timor to a minimum. Women had also been indirectly affected by Indonesia's illegal occupation through the killing, torture and disappearance of husbands, children, parents and friends.

KAN AKATANI, from the Free East Timor Japan Coalition and the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, said the "Indonesation" of East Timor was moving at a very fast pace. He hoped forced birth control and family planning would cease in that Territory. He called for human rights organizations and pro-democracy movements to be allowed to operate freely in East Timor.

He called for the decolonization and liberation of East Timor from Indonesia. Public opinion could play an important role in the East Timor issue. For example, showing documentaries worldwide on the East Timor situation could serve such a purpose.

Mr. Akatani said that after the Dili massacre, Indonesian soldiers had knowingly administered pills to the wounded Timorese, which instead of helping them had actually killed them. The doctors had been accomplices to those murders. Two and a half years after that incident no investigation had been conducted in those hospitals. Such incidents portrayed how the colonial Power could do whatever it pleased in East Timor, without fear of the international community.

INGELA MARTENSSON, of Parliamentarians for East Timor, said that the East Timorese people were living as if they were in prison. Approximately 10,000 Indonesian soldiers and 3,000 police were stationed in the Territory. Military and police forces were part of an enormous oppression apparatus. The Government of Indonesia had built new roads and 5,000 houses in some 40 new villages, but those settlements reminded her of the so-called "strategic villages" in Iraq. The majority of the inhabitants of those villages would like to return to their own villages.

"Xanana" Gusmao, the human rights activist, was serving a 20 year prison sentence. That individual was a symbol of East Timorese resistance because he had rejected Indonesia's claim that they had integrated the territory into Indonesia. He had been sentenced in a trial which had not complied with international standards nor with Indonesian law. No lawyer had been present during his interrogation. A defence lawyer, with close contacts to the Indonesian military, had later been named to his case, but it was not clear that he represented Gusmao's best interests. International human rights observers had been denied access to the court file on the case. Parliamentarians for East Timor believed that Gusmao had not received a fair trial and that he should be released and allowed to choose a sanctuary.

THOMAS S. MAHEDY, of Pax Christi International, said that an intervention by his organization to the fiftieth meeting of the Commission on Human Rights on 18 February this year, had reported that survivors of the 12 November 1991 Dili massacre had been killed after being taken to Wira Husada Military Hospital. Several initiatives could be undertaken to deal with self-determination issues in East Timor, including the honouring of commitments made to the Commission on Human Rights and providing access to its Special Rapporteurs, working groups and United Nations specialized agencies. Freer access to East Timor by international human rights groups should also be allowed. Any serious proposals for dialogue must include the people of East Timor, he said.

CHARLES SCHEINER, East Timor Action Network of the United States, said that the East Timorese people should play a role in any negotiation between Indonesia and Portugal. The Jakarta Government was feeling international pressure, but it was suppressing discussion and hiding unpleasant realities. The recent Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor in Manila had become a world class news event because of the clumsy attempts of "the generals" in Jakarta and Manila to prevent it.

Many in the United States Administration and Congress supported the status quo in Indonesia because of American corporate interests in trade, mining and weapons sales. But since 1992, the Congress has prohibited all United States military aid to Indonesia. Last July the State Department refused to allow the resale of four American-made F-5E fighter planes from Jordan to Indonesia. Over 150 members of Congress had written to President Clinton urging action in support of East Timor, and last fall the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had unanimously approved an amendment linking arms sales to Indonesia to human rights concerns over East Timor. The bill never reached the full Senate, but it was the first attempt to link arms sales to human rights in Indonesia. Other legislation approved by congressional committees would challenge United States support for multilateral loans and non-humanitarian aid for countries with excessive military involvement in their economies or which falsely report military spending. Indonesia had been the principal illustration of those problems.

JOSE MARI DE ALBUQUERQUE, Agir pour Timor, said his organization's main task had been to expose the situation in East Timor in France. The issue had a special impact in the Portuguese community in France, the largest one in the world outside Portugal. Also, a campaign called "Four Months for East Timor" had been launched by 12 French non-governmental organizations in March this year. The campaign's main purpose had been to call attention to the issue at the Conference of the Consultative Group on Indonesia which took place in Paris last week. Each non-governmental organization that participated in the campaign had published an article on East Timor in their bulletins. Also, a campaign bulletin had been published. Furthermore, the campaign had addressed its concerns to the Indonesian Embassy, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had also reached the French Parliament.

He said that the campaign's efforts would be futile unless Governments worldwide exerted pressure on the Indonesian Government. The French Government, for example, did not recognize the Indonesian annexation of East Timor and believed the Indonesian presence there to be exploitative and abusive. However, the French Government had failed to exert pressure on the Indonesian Government because of economic interests. France was one of the most important arms supplier to Indonesia and had invested heavily there. Unless Governments around the world exerted pressure on the Indonesian Government, the situation in East Timor would not improve, he emphasized.

RICHARD KOCH, of British Coalition for East Timor, said that it was sad that on 8 July donor nations had decided to increase aid to Indonesia for next year to a record $5.2 billion. That demonstrated that Western nations expressed hope that Indonesia's human rights record would improve, while doing nothing that might actually pressure Jakarta to change its ways.

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office had dedicated its energies to defending its policies on arms sales to Indonesia, including the sale of Hawk jet fighters worth 500 million pounds sterling. The British Government had defended those sales by invoking Article 51 of the Charter which guarantees United Nations Member States the right to self-defence while denying that right to the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The British Government was effectively saying that the Indonesian armed forces had the British seal of approval.

Britain's tolerance of Indonesia's East Timor policy dated to the 1975 invasion, he said. At that time the British Ambassador had suggested that it was "in Britain's interest that Indonesia should absorb the territory as soon and as unobtrusively as possible".

PEDRO PINTO LEITE, International Platform of Jurists for East Timor, said that the colonialist regime of Jakarta was aware of its defeat and had intensified repression in the occupied Territory. That 10,000 Indonesian soldiers had failed to crush Timorese resistance in 18 years of occupation was evidence of their defeat. The massacre of Santa Cruz showed that Timorese youth were willing to fight for freedom, refusing to be Indonesian.

Two months ago in the community of Uelau, the military murdered an unarmed young boy and threw his body into a river, he said. In May, 11 persons were arrested for demonstrating before foreign journalists. In June, two young Timorese were sentenced to prison for three years for raising the flag of the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN). In May, two other Timorese were arrested in Malang in East Java; one of them was a leader of RENETIL, the Maubere student resistance movement. Indonesia had forced East Timorese, who were animist, to choose one of five officially accepted religions. The Government was building mosques all over the Territory with the expectation that the East Timorese would choose Islam.

The Indonesian dictatorship was also losing the war on the diplomatic front, he said. In Bangkok, more than a hundred Asian human rights organizations had appealed for East Timorese self-determination. In Manila, the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor had been on the front pages of many Philippine newspapers for three weeks despite attempts by Jakarta to stop it. Just two weeks ago, in Kuala Lumpur, a forum on East Timor organized by 30 non-governmental organizations had criticized Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Governments for tolerating human rights violations in the Territory.

LITA KILLUP, of the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor and the Philippine Solidarity for East Timor and Indonesia, said every time the Philippines called attention to the situation in East Timor, Indonesia exerted pressure by threatening to freeze that country's economic interests there. The United Nations had to act as soon as possible by passing new Security Council resolutions so that the people in East Timor could enjoy self-determination. An immediate cease-fire, demilitarization and the establishment of a peace plan should be put in place. All of which should be done under supervision of the United Nations, she went on.

She called for the freedom of all East Timorese political prisoners especially Xanana Gusmao, who symbolized the Timorese resistance movement. Abuses of women in East Timor should cease and the Indonesian efforts to decrease the Timorese population growth should be investigated.